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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine why some young farmers continue to attend Wisconsin's five-year (part-time) instructional program and others drop out. Specifically, both groups were compared in personal characteristics, satisfaction regarding in-class instruction, satisfaction regarding on-farm instruction, and relevance of program to student's needs. Mail questionnaires were sent to a random sample of everyone enrolled for at least one year since 1967; returns totaled 75 for dropouts and 195 for continuing students. It was concluded that: (1) dropouts were generally older and more established in farming--they were interested less in developing problem-solving abilities than in acquiring the most recent technological information; (2) respondents generally were satisfied with their instructors' teaching abilities; (3) general agreement existed that feeds and feeding, crop production, soils and fertilizers, and farm records should receive the most emphasis; (4) respondents were generally satisfied with the administration of the in-class instructional program; (5) more respondents placed greater emphasis on the on-farm instructional part than on the in-class part; and (6) two-thirds or more in each group indicated their needs were almost or completely met by these programs; reasons for dropping out were primarily of a personal nature. (KM)

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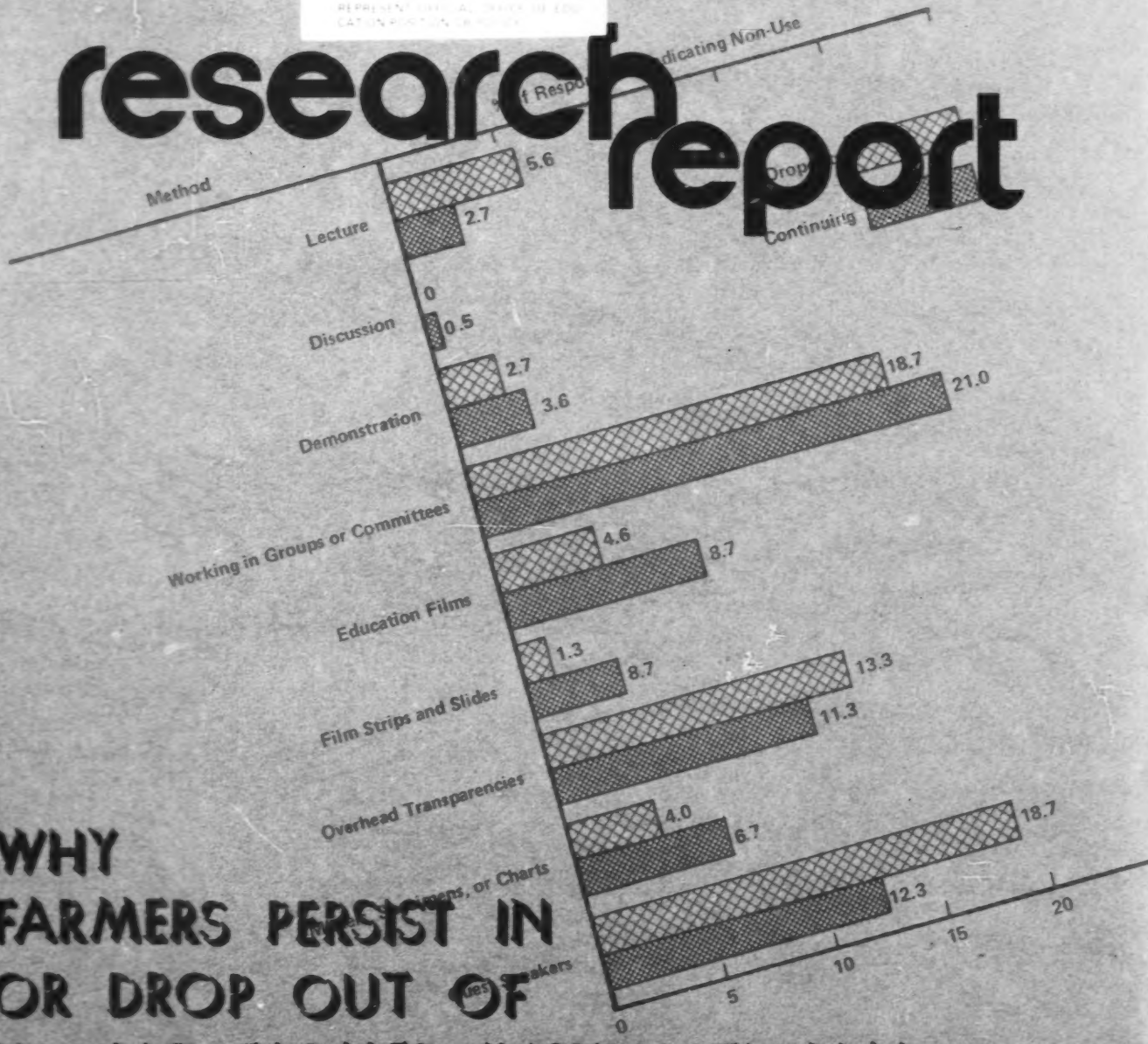
research report



WHY FARMERS PERSIST IN OR DROP OUT OF YOUNG FARMER INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

Research Division
College of Agricultural and Life Sciences
University of Wisconsin-Madison

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Why Farmers Persist in or Drop out of Young Farmer Instructional Programs

*H.R. Matteson and J.F. Thompson**

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Summary

The major purpose of this study was to determine why some students continue to attend an educational program for farmers and others drop out. Specific objectives were to compare the two groups in terms of personal characteristics and satisfaction regarding the instructional program. Another objective was to determine the relevance of the program to the students' needs.

Data were collected by a mail questionnaire which was sent to a random sample of 183 dropouts and 243 continuing students. Seventy-five dropouts and 195 continuing students returned usable questionnaires.

Major Findings

1. Dropouts were generally older, had considerably more farming experience, owned more of the land they operated, had larger farms, had more net worth and slightly more education than the continuing students but had taken less vocational agriculture in high school.
2. Older students enrolled in the program to obtain information about their farming problems. Younger students enrolled because they wanted to develop their ability to solve their farming problems. Dropouts enrolled for informational purposes whereas continuing students had a tendency to enroll to increase their problem solving ability.
3. More than half of the dropouts and one-third of the continuing students who enrolled for informational purposes believed the major objective of the program was to develop their problem solving ability.
4. Although dropouts had a tendency to rate their instructors slightly lower than continuing students, over 80 percent of both groups indicated that their instructors were up-to-date technologically and provided students with the most relevant aspects of the subjects they were teaching. The more education a respondent had, the more likely he would rate his instructor lower.
5. Both groups felt their instructors made good use of teaching methods. Continuing students, however, generally rated their instructors' use of selected teaching methods higher than did dropouts.
6. In general, respondents felt their instructors were providing an adequate balance between theory and practice. Continuing students, however, rated their instructors' teaching abilities higher than did dropouts.
7. Content areas which dropouts and continuing students felt should be emphasized the most were feeds and feeding, soils and fertilizers, crop production and farm records. Respondents believed insurance, farm power and farm buildings should receive the least emphasis.
8. More than three-fourths of the respondents felt that classes should be held during the evening for two hours. About half of the respondents preferred weekly or biweekly classes during the slack season but switching to a monthly schedule during the rest of the year. An additional 20 percent wanted monthly classes throughout the year.
9. Instructors tended to visit continuing students more than the dropouts. The majority of these visits were made either once a month or whenever the students requested their instructors' assistance. There was generally agreement that farm visits should last for one to two hours.
10. Although a majority of the farm visits were scheduled one or two weeks in advance, approximately one-eighth of the dropouts and one-fifth of the continuing students indicated that their instructors stopped in without prior notice. Two-thirds of the respondents in both groups reported that they "always" or usually understood the purpose of the visit beforehand.
11. A large majority of the respondents felt the on-farm instruction was equally or more important than the classroom phase of the program.

    Both dropouts and continuing students who emphasized on-farm instruction felt their instructors were technologically up to date and generally rated the instructors' teaching abilities higher than those who emphasized classroom instruction.
12. Continuing students indicated that the program was more relevant to their needs than did the dropouts. The dropouts left the program for personal reasons (needed time for recreation, organizations, church, etc.) rather than for dissatisfaction with the program.

    Dropouts who (1) emphasized on-farm instruction, (2) were involved in the planning of their farm visits, and (3) felt their instructors were doing a good job with the discussion and lecture method also perceived the program to be relevant to their needs.

    Continuing students who (1) understood the purpose of a farm visit prior to the visit, (2) felt their instructors were very adequately using selected teaching methods, and (3) indicated their instructors maintained an adequate balance between theory and practice also perceived the program to be meeting most of their needs.

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Introduction

Post secondary education in agriculture has undergone considerable change in Wisconsin during the past decade. Prior to the passage of the 1963 Vocational Education Act, the majority of the young and adult farmer instruction was being conducted by secondary school vocational agricultural teachers. These programs were limited in scope and annually involved about ten hours of classroom instruction usually during the winter months.

The Wisconsin Board of Vocational Technical and Adult Education (WBVTAE) initiated a comprehensive instructional program in 1967 to help meet farmers' educational needs. The program provides a five-year sequence of in-class (30 hours annually) and on-farm instruction (20 hours annually) for beginning farmers. Currently 46 full-time instructors are providing a comprehensive instructional program for 4,000 young farmers.[1]

Purpose of the Study

One concern of program leaders is the relatively high "drop out" rate. Only 56.7 percent of the farmers who enrolled in the five-year program that began in 1967 returned to the program in 1968. By 1969 only 43.3 percent of the 1967 original enrollees participated in the program. A similar trend exists for the programs beginning in 1968 and 1969.

The major purpose of this study was to determine why some young farmers continue to attend the five-year instructional program and others drop out. The specific objectives of the study were to compare both groups in:

1. Personal Characteristics
   - A. Age
   - B. Education
   - C. Farming Experience
   - D. Farm Ownership
   - E. Farm Size
   - F. Major Farm Enterprises and Net Worth

2. Satisfaction Expressed Regarding In-Class Instruction
   - A. Reasons for Enrolling
   - B. Perception of Program Objectives After Enrolling
   - C. Respondents' Impression of Their Instructors' Teaching Abilities
     1. Instructor's Technical Know-How and Ability to Select and Organize Relevant Content
     2. Instructor's Ability to Use Various Teaching Methods
     3. Instructor's Ability to Maintain an Adequate Balance Between Theory and Practice
     4. General Impression of Instructor's Teaching Ability
   - D. Content Areas Which Should Receive Emphasis in the Instructional Program
   - E. Opinions Regarding Administrative Aspects of the Instructional Program
     1. Adequacy of Instructional Facilities
     2. Appropriate Location for the Instructional Program
     3. Appropriate Time, Frequency, and Duration of Classes

3. Satisfaction Expressed Regarding On-Farm Instruction
   - A. Number of Hours Devoted to On-Farm Instruction
   - B. Frequency and Duration of Farm Visits
   - C. Arranging Farm Visits
     1. When Farm Visits are Scheduled
     2. Understanding the Purpose of Farm Visits
     3. Determining the Purpose of Future Visits
   - D. Relative Importance of On-Farm Instruction

4. Relevance of Program to the Students' Needs
   - A. The Extent to Which Students' Needs Were Met
   - B. Reasons for Dropping Out of the Program

[1] Effective March 1, 1971, all classes conducted by instructors employed part time (generally secondary school vocational agricultural instructors) by the WBVTAE are designated as adult farm classes. Conversely, those classes conducted by instructors employed full time by WBVTAE are designated as young farmer classes.

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Study Design

The 4,000 students enrolled in the young farmer program for at least one year since 1967 were the population for this study. They were divided into two groups, dropouts[2] and continuing students. A proportional[3] random sample of 250 was drawn from each of these groups.

A mail questionaire was sent to those farmers through the agricultural instructors in their districts. The researchers held meetings with these instructors prior to mailing the questionnaire to solicit their assistance and instruct them about how the questionnaire was to be administered.

The instructors either mailed or personally delivered the questionnaires to the farmers and checked periodically to determine if they had completed and returned them. Instructors were not present, however, when the farmer filled out the questionnaire.

The researchers were in constant telephone communication with the instructors to avoid any misunderstandings and to solve problems as they occurred. A second mail questionnaire was sent to individuals not responding one month after the first mailing.

One difficulty encountered in the data collection process was that 67 students categorized as "dropouts" were improperly classified due to inaccuracies in the original list of students.

Of the 183 dropouts who were appropriately classified, 75 or approximately 41 percent[4] returned usable questionnaires. Nearly 79 percent or 195 of the 243 continuing students who were accurately classified returned usable questionnaires.

Personal Characteristics

Age

Students no longer enrolled in the young farmer program are generally older than those who have continued. Only one-third of the dropouts were 35 or less. Their average age was 40.

Half of the continuing students, however, were 35 or less. Their average age was 35.

Education

Although no significant difference existed between the educational background of the continuing and dropout students, the dropouts tended to have more college education than the continuing students. Approximately 15 percent of the dropout students but only eight percent of the continuing students completed one year or more of college. About the same number of dropouts and continuing students had attended the University of Wisconsin's Farm and Industry Short Course or at least one year in a post secondary vocational-technical program.

Approximately 80 percent of both groups completed high school. About half of each group completed a high school vocational agricultural program. More dropout students (36.7 percent) than continuing students (22.6 percent), however, had one year or less of vocational agriculture. Older respondents tended to have less education than younger respondents.

Farming Experience

The dropouts had considerably more years of farming experience (16) than the continuing students (11.5). Farming experience had a strong, positive correlation with age for both groups, but a negative correlation with education. That is, older farmers had more farming experience, but were less educated.

Farm Ownership

Three-fourths of the continuing students and two-thirds of the dropout students own a part or all of the land they are presently operating. Approximately 10 percent of each group farm through a partnership agreement.

Twelve percent of the dropouts and 2.5 percent of the continuing students stated they were working more than 50 days per year off the farm.

Many differences between the groups regarding ownership and days worked off the farm can be explained by their present occupations. Eighty-eight percent of the dropouts compared to 98.5 percent of the continuing students are presently farming.

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[2] Dropouts are those enrolled in the program for at least one year since 1967 but were not enrolled at the time the sample was drawn.

[3] Wisconsin has fourteen vocational districts which have young farmer instructional programs. A proportional sample was drawn to allow each district to contribute to the sample in proportion to the number of students it has enrolled or "dropped out" compared to the number of enrollees and dropouts in the State.

[4] The sample was drawn with the expectation of obtaining at least a 50 percent return. Since only 41 percent of the dropouts returned their questionnaires this places some, although not severe limitations on the findings of this study.

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Age and farming experience were positively correlated with farm ownership for both groups. Education, however, was negatively correlated with ownership for the continuing students. This relationship is partly explained by the continuing students being younger and having more education. They had less time than the dropouts to become established in farming.

Farm Size

The farms operated by the dropouts were generally larger than those operated by the continuing students. The average farm size for the dropouts was 365 acres compared to 224 acres for the continuing students. More than one-third of the dropouts operated over 300 acres, while only one-fourth of the continuing students operated farms that size.

Major Farm Enterprises and Net Worth

Although dairy is the most important enterprise for both groups, more dropouts (9.3 percent) than continuing students (5.7 percent) considered beef and swine their major farming enterprises.

Dropouts tend to have more net worth than the continuing students. The average net worth of the dropout is approximately $50,000, compared to $45,000 for the continuing students. Farming experience and age are positively correlated with net worth for both groups of respondents.

Satisfaction Expressed Regarding In-Class Instruction

Reasons for Enrolling

Dropouts tended to enroll in the young farmer program because they wanted "to obtain information about their farming problems." Continuing students tended to enroll because they wanted "to develop their ability to solve their farming problems." Specifically, 42.7 percent of the dropouts enrolled for information. However, only 26.2 percent of the continuing students enrolled for this purpose. Conversely, enrollment for developing problem solving ability was indicated by 47.7 percent of the continuing students versus 34.7 percent for dropouts. Approximately one-sixth of each group gave "My instructor encouraged me to attend" as their reason for enrolling in the program.

When age is related to reasons for enrolling, the results for the dropouts and continuing students are somewhat different. More than four-fifths of the dropouts who enrolled for informational purposes were over 35. Only half of the continuing students who enrolled for this purpose were over 35. The opposite situation existed for those enrolling to develop their problem solving abilities. Approximately half of the dropouts and two-thirds of the continuing students who enrolled for this reason were under 35. Also two-thirds of the dropouts who indicated "My instructor encouraged me to attend" as their reason for enrolling were over 35. Only one-third of the continuing students who gave this as their reason for enrolling were over 35.

Perception of Program Objectives after Attending

Both groups were asked, "After attending young farmer classes, what do you believe the major objective was?" Almost 23 percent of the dropouts and 15.9 percent of the continuing students responded, "to provide young farmers with information about their farming problems." About half of each group responded, "to help young farmers develop their problem solving abilities so that they can solve their present and future farming problems." An additional 25 percent of each group believed the main objective of the program was to provide young farmers with an opportunity to exchange ideas about their farming problems.

A question which can appropriately be raised at this point is: Was the respondents' perceived major program objective after attending classes similar to their initial reason for enrolling in the program? Data in Table 1 reveals that more than half of the dropouts and one-third of the continuing students who initially enrolled for informational purposes believed after attending, that the major objective of the program was to develop problem solving abilities. The majority of both groups that initially enrolled to increase their problem solving ability felt that was also the major program objective after attending the classes.

Dropouts that enrolled because they were encouraged by their instructors tended to perceive the program objective as being "to provide young farmers with an opportunity to exchange ideas" or "to provide young farmers with information." Continuing students who enrolled because of instructor influence were more likely to perceive the program objective as being "to help young farmers develop their problem solving ability."

[5] This variable refers to respondents perception of the program objectives after having been enrolled in the program for at least one year. The "reasons for enrolling" variable refers to respondents perception of the program's objectives when they initially enrolled but before they participated in the program.

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TABLE 1

PERCEPTIONS OF MAJOR PROGRAM OBJECTIVES AFTER PARTICIPATING VERSUS INITIAL REASONS FOR ENROLLING.

Perceptions of Major Program Objectives	Reasons for Enrolling					
	Dropouts			Continuing		
	To Obtain Information	To Develop Problem Solving Ability	Encouraged by Instructor	To Obtain Information	To Develop Problem Solving Ability	Encouraged by Instructor
	(Percent)	(Percent)	(Percent)	(Percent)	(Percent)	(Percent)
Provide young farmers with information	34.4	3.8	33.3	27.5	5.4	21.9
Help young farmers develop their problem solving ability	53.1	61.5	16.7	35.3	75.3	43.8
Provide young farmers with an opportunity to exchange ideas	9.4	34.7	50.0	35.2	19.3	28.1
Other	3.1	0	0	2.0	0	6.2

Respondents' Impression of Their Instructors' Teaching Abilities

Instructor's Technical Know How and Ability to Select and Organize Relevant Content

Do you believe your instructor was up-to-date technologically? Did he provide you with the most relevant aspects of the subject he was teaching? Could you have better understood the content of the classes if it had been organized in a different manner? These were some of the questions respondents were asked to determine their impressions of their instructors.

Although the dropouts had a tendency to rate their instructors slightly lower than the continuing students, a large majority (over 80 percent) of both groups indicated that their instructors were up-to-date technologically and provided the students with the most relevant aspects of the subjects they were teaching. A positive correlation existed between these two variables and age for both groups and a negative correlation between these variables and education. In other words, the older respondents were more likely to indicate that their instructors were technologically up to date and selected the most relevant aspects of the subjects they were teaching than the younger respondents. The more education a responden had the more likely he would indicate that his instructor was not technologically up to date and not selecting the most relevant aspects of the subject he was teaching. These relationships were stronger for dropouts than continuing students.

A significant number of dropouts (17.3 percent) and continuing students (8.7 percent) indicated that they could have understood the content of the classes better if it had been organized in a different manner.

Collectively, responses indicated a strong relationship between an instructor's technological know-how, his ability to select the most relevant aspects of the subjects he was teaching, and his ability to organize the course content. This relationship was emphasized more by dropouts' responses than by those of continuing students.

Once again the older respondents in both groups were more satisfied with the organization of the course content than were the younger respondents.

Instructors' Ability to Use Various Teaching Methods

Besides the content aspects of an instructional program, a good teacher must be able to select and properly use a variety of teaching methods. Consequently, the respondents were asked to rate their instructor's use of nine different methods in terms of the following four categories: (1) Did not use, (2) Poor, (3) Fair, and (4) Good.

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To compare the responses made by the dropouts and continuing students for these nine methods, a weighted mean score[6] was computed from the dropouts' and continuing students' responses for each method. These scores and a ranking of these methods based on the weighted mean score are included in Table 2.

An analysis of the data in Table 2 reveals that considerable agreement existed between the dropouts and continuing students regarding how well they felt their instructors were using these methods.

For example, both groups felt their instructors made good use of film strips and the discussion method. Instructors were also highly rated by both groups on their use of speakers, overhead transparencies, educational films, lectures, and demonstrations.

The greatest discrepancy between dropouts' and continuing students' responses occurred in their impressions of their instructors' abilities to use the group or committee method. Continuing students ranked their instructors higher than did the dropouts.

An interesting observation reflected in Graph I is that some methods effectively used by some instructors were not used at all by other instructors. For example, approximately one-fifth of both groups indicated their instructors did not use the "working in committees or groups" method. A similar response was made for overhead transparencies and speakers.

Responses about how well instructors used the methods were related positively to their abilities to select and organize the course content. This relationship was strongest for group or committee work, lecture, discussion, and demonstration methods.

Instructor's Ability to Maintain an Adequate Balance Between Theory and Practice

More than 90 percent of the continuing students and 80 percent of the dropouts responded that their instructors were providing an adequate balance between theory and practice.

Nearly ten percent of the dropouts but only two percent of the continuing students felt their instructors were too theoretical. Approximately two percent of each group felt their instructors did not provide enough theory.

TABLE 2

RESPONDENTS' IMPRESSIONS OF THEIR INSTRUCTORS' USE OF VARIOUS TEACHING METHODS

Methods	Dropout		Continuing	
	WMS*	Rank	WMS	Rank
Lecture	2.6	4.5	2.7	2.5
Discussion	2.7	1.5	2.8	1
Demonstration	2.5	7	2.6	6
Working in Committees or Groups	2.4	8.5	2.6	6
Educational Films	2.6	4.5	2.6	6
Film strips	2.7	1.5	2.7	2.5
Overhead transparencies	2.5	4.5	2.6	6
Models	2.4	8.5	2.4	9
Speakers	2.6	4.5	2.6	6

*Weighted Mean Score

[6] A weighted mean score was calculated by assigning a value of one (1) to all "poor" responses, a value of two (2) to all "fair" responses, and a value of three (3) for all "good" responses. The number of responses in each of these categories was multiplied by the value assigned to that category. The totals for the three categories were added and then divided by the total number of responses.

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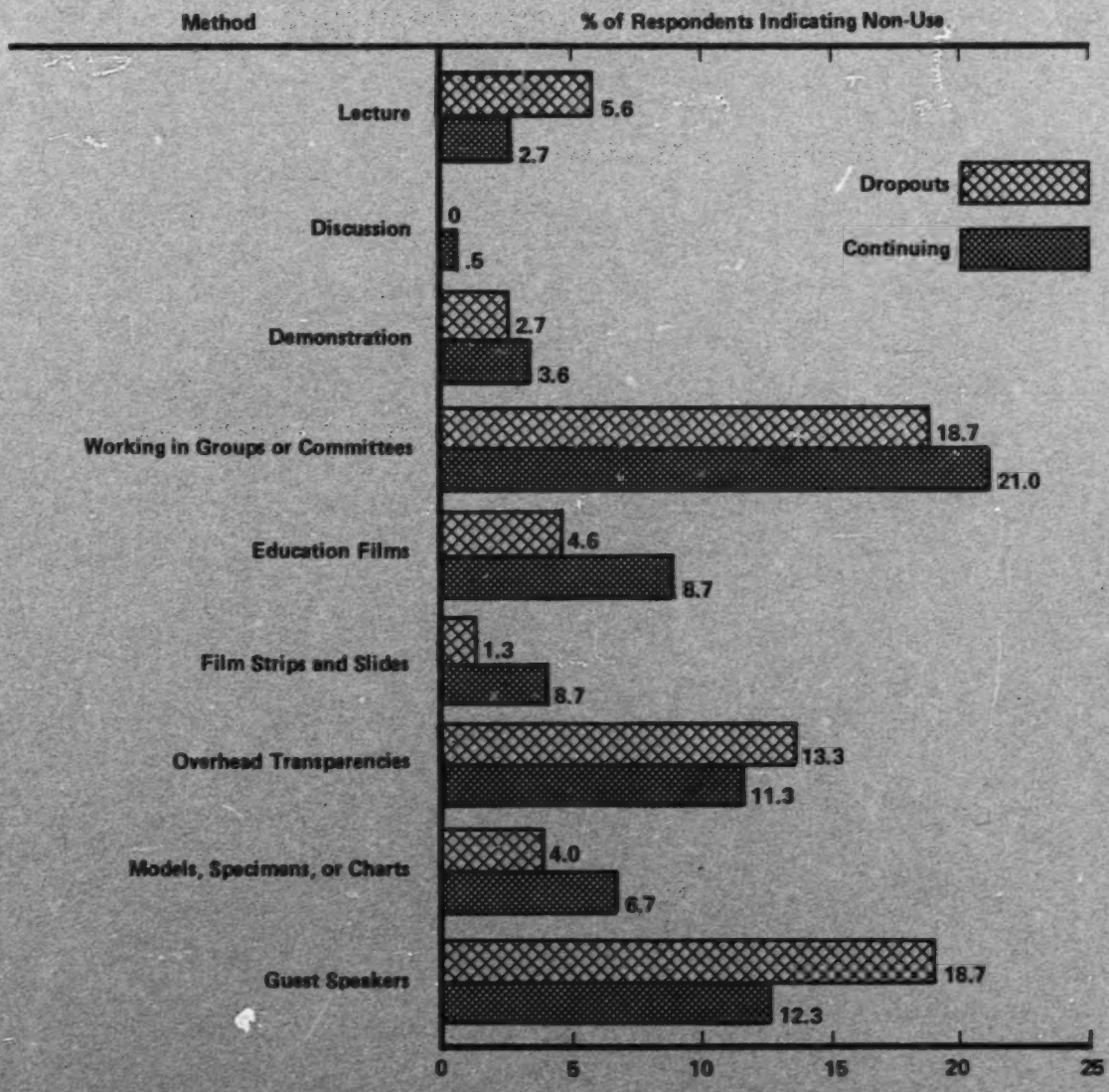
Graph I

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS INDICATING THEIR INSTRUCTORS WERE NOT USING VARIOUS TEACHING METHODS



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The instructors' ability to select and organize the course content was positively correlated with their ability to provide an adequate balance between theory and practice. Continuing student responses also indicated a strong relationship between the instructor's technological know-how and his ability to provide a balance between theory and practice. The dropouts' age and perceived program objectives after attending were negatively correlated with their responses regarding the instructor's ability to maintain an adequate balance between theory and practice. That is, older dropouts were more likely to indicate that their instructors were too theoretical than younger dropouts. Also, dropouts who felt after attending that the major program objective was to develop their problem solving abilities more frequently indicated that their instructors were too theoretical.

General Impression of Insiructors' Teaching Ability

When asked to rate teaching ability as poor, adequate, good, or excellent, continuing students graded.

Approximately one-half of the continuing students, versus less than one-fourth of the dropouts rated their instructors "excellent." Conversely, one-tenth of the continuing students rated their instructors "poor or adequate" while nearly one-fourth of the dropouts responded in this manner.

Respondents in both groups who rated their instructors highly also believed they were up-to-date technologically, selected the most relevant aspects of the subjects they were teaching and adequately organized the content of their courses. Older dropouts tended to rate their instructors higher than did younger dropouts. This relationship did not exist for continuing students. Dropouts were, in general, older than the continuing students which may partially account for the difference between the groups.

Content Areas Which Should Receive Emphasis in the Instructional Program

Ten major content areas appropriate for use in the young farmer instructional program were indentified. The respondents were asked how much emphasis (none, some or much) each area should receive. A weighted mean score was calculated on the same basis used for rating teaching methods (Table 2). The weighted mean scores used in this case for the various content areas and a ranking of the relative importance of each are located in Table 3.

TABLE 3

IMPORTANCE RESPONDENTS PLACE ON VARIOUS CONTENT AREAS

Content Areas	Dropout		Continuing	
	WMS*	Rank	WMS	Rank
Income Tax	2.4	6	2.4	6
Farm Records	2.5	4	2.6	2
Soils and Fertilizer	2.6	2.5	2.6	2
Crop Production	2.6	2.5	2.5	4
Feeds and Feeding	2.7	1	2.6	2
Animal Breeding	2.4	6	2.4	6
Farm Buildings	2.3	8	2.1	8.5
Farm Power	2.1	9	2.1	8.5
Weed Control	2.4	6	2.4	6
Insurance	2.0	10	2.0	10

*Weighted Mean Score

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An analysis of these data reveal the four content areas which the dropouts and continuing students felt should be emphasized the most were feeds and feeding, soil and fertilizers, crop production, and farm records. Conversely, the areas which both groups believed should receive the least emphasis were insurance, farm power, and farm buildings.

Although no significant difference existed between the groups regarding the emphasis they placed on the ten content areas, the dropouts emphasized crop production, feeds and feeding, and farm buildings more than the continuing students. The situation was just the opposite, however, regarding the emphasis each group placed on farm records.

Opinions Regarding Administrative Aspects of the Instructional Program

Adequacy of Instructional Facilities

When asked to give their opinion of the classroom laboratories and other instructional facilities, 86.2 percent of all the respondents indicated that they were adequate to very adequate.

The dropouts, once again, were less satisfied with the instructional facilities than the continuing students. Nearly one-fifth of the dropouts said the facilities were partially or completely inadequate, but only one-tenth of the continuing students agreed.

Appropriate Location for the Instructional Program

Generally, the two major criteria used to determine where a young farmer class should be held are the adequacy of the facilities and the distance students must travel to attend class at a particular location. Consequently, the respondents were asked the distance they were or had been traveling to class and how far they would travel to attend.

The average distance the dropouts traveled was 7.2 miles compared to 6.4 miles for the continuing students.

Although more dropouts (8.0 percent) than continuing students (3.6 percent) stated that they were traveling too far, nearly three-fourths of both groups were willing to travel farther to attend classes. Dropouts indicated they would travel an average maximum of 12.8 miles, while the continuing students indicated they would travel 13.5 miles.

Appropriate Time Frequency and Duration of Classes

Nearly 96 percent of the continuing students and 91 percent of the dropouts preferred night classes. About 17 percent of the dropouts and 2.6 percent of the continuing students desired their instruction in the afternoon. No respondent wanted classes in the morning.

When asked how often a class should meet, about half of both groups preferred weekly or bi-weekly classes during the slack season, but switching to a monthly schedule during the rest of the year. An additional 20 percent of each group wanted classes on a monthly basis throughout the year. The remaining 30 percent were somewhat equally divided between a desire to have instruction "weekly" or "every two weeks" throughout the year.

Seventy-six percent of the dropouts and 82.6 percent of the continuing students felt two hours was the appropriate length of time for classes. A relatively larger percentage of the dropouts (13.3 percent) than the continuing students (6.2 percent), however, felt the class should be three hours long. Only five percent of each group wanted one hour classes.

Satisfaction Expressed Regarding On-Farm Instruction

Number of Hours Devoted to On-Farm Instruction

When asked how many hours of on-farm instruction had been given during the year, the students responded anywhere between "none" to more than forty hours. Instructors, on the average, tended to visit continuing students more (13.5 hours) than they visited the dropouts (12.8 hours). Nearly 60 percent of each group, however, were visited between five and twenty-four hours during the year. Approximately six percent of the dropouts and two percent of the continuing students reported no visit by the instructor.

Frequency and Duration of Farm Visits

The frequency of visits for dropouts and continuing students was about the same. Instructors visited about half of both groups once a month. An additional quarter of these groups indicated their instructor made a visit "whenever I requested help or assistance."

When asked how often instructors should visit, about half of each group responded "once a month" whereas nearly one-third of each group responded "whenever I request his assistance." Sixty-four percent of the continuing students and 57 percent of the dropouts were satisfied with the frequency of their instructors' farm visits. Approximately 19 percent of the dropouts and 16 percent of the continuing students visited on a specific schedule preferred changing to visits when they requested their instructors' assistance. Conversely, 13.6 percent of the dropouts and 7.8 percent of the continuing students visited only at their request preferred changing to visits scheduled by the instructor.

Considerable agreement existed between the dropouts and continuing students regarding

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the duration of a farm visit. Nearly 90 percent of all respondents indicated that a farm visit should be from one to two hours in length. No one thought a visit should last for more than three hours.

Arranging Farm Visits

When Farm Visits are Scheduled

Slightly more than 40 percent of each group stated that their instructors scheduled their visits one week in advance. One-third of the dropouts and one-fourth of the continuing students had visits scheduled at least two weeks in advance. Twelve percent of the dropouts and 21 percent of the continuing students had visits without prior notice.

Understanding the Purpose of Farm Visits

The students were asked if they understood the purpose of the farm visit before the instructor arrived. More than two-thirds of each group reported that they "always" or "usually" understood the purpose of the meeting beforehand. Only five percent of each group indicated they never understood the purpose of the visit before the instructor arrived.

Four out of five continuing students and three out of four dropouts that did not understand the purpose of the visits beforehand, also stated that their instructors dropped in without prior notice or never came to their farms.

The respondents' perceptions of their instructors' teaching abilities was related positively to the degree to which they understood the purpose of the farm visit. That is, respondents in both groups who rated their instructors the highest also usually or always understood the purpose of the farm visit.

Determining the Purpose of Future Visits

Approximately half of the dropouts and one-third of the continuing students and their instructors usually or always determined during visits what subject or problem would be covered at future visits. Conversely, sixteen percent of the dropouts and 11.8 percent of the continuing students indicated that the subject or problem for future visits was not determined during previous ones.

Generally, the subject or problem to be discussed at a particular visit was not understood beforehand unless it was determined jointly by the student and the instructor during a previous visit.

Respondents that were always or usually involved in planning their next farm visit tended to rate their instructors' teaching abilities higher than those who were sometimes or never involved.

Relative Importance of On-Farm Instruction

Respondents were asked to indicate the importance of on-farm instruction compared to classroom instruction. One-third of each group stated that on-farm instruction was more important, while approximately one-fifth of each group indicated that the classroom instruction was the more important part of the program. About 37 percent of the dropouts and 44 percent of the continuing students felt classroom and on-farm instruction were equally important. Only four percent of the dropouts and two percent of the continuing students stated that on-farm instruction was not very important.

Strong relationships existed between this variable and a number of variables mentioned previously. For example, dropouts who emphasized on-farm more than classroom instruction were more likely to indicate that their instructors were appropriately selecting and organizing course content. Dropouts who emphasized classroom more than on-farm instruction generally had more years of education.

Continuing students who placed the most emphasis on the on-farm instructional program also were those the instructors visited most frequently.

Both dropouts and continuing students who emphasized on-farm instruction reported their instructors were technologically up to date and generally rated the instructors' teaching abilities higher than those respondents who emphasized classroom instruction. Also, the respondents that always or usually understood the purpose of a farm visit beforehand and were involved in planning subsequent visits had a higher opinion of the importance of the on-farm instruction.

Relevance of Program to the Students' Needs

The Extent to Which Students' Needs Were Met

More continuing students than dropouts indicated that the program was more nearly meeting their needs. Three-fourths of the continuing students compared with two-thirds of the dropouts indicated that their needs were almost or completely being met by the program.

Respondents in both groups whose needs were being almost or completely met also felt their instructors were technologically up to date, were selecting the most relevant aspects of the subject and were appropriately organizing the course content. Also these respondents gener-

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ally rated their instructors' teaching abilities higher than did those who felt their needs were only partially being met.

The reasons each group gave for enrolling and their perception of the major program objective after attending were not significantly related to their responses regarding the extent to which the program had met their needs.

Dropouts who (1) emphasized on-farm instruction, (2) were involved in the planning of their farm visits and (3) felt their instructors did a good job with the discussion and lecture methods also felt the program satisfied at least most of their needs. Also, older dropouts generally felt their needs were more nearly met than did younger ones.

Continuing students who (1) understood the purpose of farm visits beforehand, (2) felt their instructors were very adequately using transparencies, models, and group work and (3) indicated their instructors maintained an adequate balance between theory and practice also felt the program was meeting most of their needs.

Reasons for Dropping Out of the Program

The dropout respondents were asked to indicate the reasons why they dropped out of the young farmer program. This procedure was used to cross validate the study.

Data in Table 4 reveal that in general students dropped out because of personal reasons or commitments rather than because they were greatly dissatisfied with the program. The personal reasons of involvement in organizations, free time needed for recreation and social activities comprise over half of all responses.

Older dropouts more frequently indicated involvement in community and church organizations and the reduction of their farming operation as their reason for dropping out than did the younger dropouts.

More younger than older dropouts stated that the instructor did not help them on the farm visit as the reason for leaving the young farmer program.

Conclusions

1. The dropouts were somewhat different than the continuing students. Dropouts were generally older and more established in farming. Since the older dropouts had more farming experience, they placed less emphasis on developing their problem solving abilities but rather enrolled to acquire the most recent technological information related to their farming operation. After attending, many perceived the major objective of the program to

TABLE 4

REASONS RESPONDENTS GAVE FOR DROPPING OUT OF YOUNG FARMER PROGRAM BY AGE

Reasons	Age	
	35 or less	Over 35
Instructor did not help me on farm visits	5	1
Too far to drive	3	3
I reduced my farming operation	3	7
Class interferred with farm work	5	4
I was too involved in such things as church, farm organizations, and community projects	4	16
What little free time I had needed to be spent in recreation and social activities	8	8
	28	39

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be "to develop problem solving ability" rather than providing "information" regarding their farming problems.

Younger dropouts often had more education than did the younger or older continuing students. Since they tended to emphasize in-class instruction more than on-farm instruction, the younger dropouts were more critical of their instructor's technical competency and his ability to select the most relevant aspects of the subjects he was teaching.

With the exception of one variable (balance between theory and practice) older respondents reacted more positively to their program than did younger respondents. Since dropouts were older, one cannot conclude that age causes dropping out. Rather, older dropouts left the program because they were involved in farm organizations, community projects and church activities or wanted more free time for recreation and social activities. Younger dropouts generally have more education and more frequently dropped out because they were dissatisfied with some aspect of the program.

Although age was not the principle reason for dropping out, it raises another very important question? Who should or is the young farming program serving? Is it really a young farmer program? If the purpose of the program is to help young farmers become established, why is a man who is 60 or older, owns 300 - 500 acres of land, and has a net worth of over $100,000 enrolled in this program? What is meant by the word "established?" The authors feel that the program instructors and agricultural chairmen or coordinators need to reexamine the purpose of the program and the criteria for the selection of students.

Also since the data indicated that most students are willing to drive farther than they have been presently driving to class, some consideration might be given to grouping students for instruction by age and/or educational background rather than geographic areas.

2. The respondents, in general, were satisfied with their instructors' teaching abilities. A number of respondents, however, felt their instructors could improve content organization. Lack of sound organization may exist in some instances because instructors are deeply involved in keeping abreast of technological advances and conducting a large number of farm visits in addition to their administrative duties. Therefore, they do not find enough time to "think about" content organization. A relatively large number of respondents in both groups indicated their instructors were not using overhead transparencies, speakers, and working in groups or committees. Also, dropouts rated their instructors lower than continuing students regarding use of the working in committees and group methods.

   Regardless of the reason, these data tend to indicate that some instructors must place more emphasis on improving the manner in which they organize their classes and the selection and use of a variety of teaching methods. Furthermore, teacher education institutions should be cognizant of this situation and provide appropriate in-service training for instructors who are having this difficulty.

3. General agreement existed that feeds and feeding, crop production, soils and fertilizers, and farm records should receive the most emphasis. Although instructors can use this statement as a general guide for program preparation, the researchers caution that many respondents have other individual needs.

4. Both groups were generally satisfied with the administration of the in-class instructional program. Two exceptions, however, were: (a) a considerable number of dropouts desired classes during the afternoon; and (b) there was wide variation in the responses made by both groups regarding frequency of the classes. There was some agreement, however, that classes should be held more frequently in the slack seasons.

   Even though certain trends do exist, the most appropriate frequency and time of day to hold classes will vary from one district to another. These two variables may serve as criteria for grouping students for class instruction in addition to the students' specific geographic location.

5. Farm visits have been and probably will continue to be an important part of the young farmer program. More respondents placed greater emphasis on the on-farm instructional part rather than the in-classroom part of the program. However, a significant number felt the in-classroom instruction was most important. Consequently, the data do not support a general opinion expressed by some instructors that their students want only the on-farm instruction and have no desire to attend the classes. If this is the situation in a specific locality, then the instructor should question the quality and adequacy of his classes. In

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other words, the concept of in-class instruction may be acceptable but the classes being provided may not be.

Respondents wanted to know the purpose of the visit beforehand. They also wanted to be involved in planning the farm visit.

There was no set pattern of how often farm visits should be made. Some farmers being visited on a scheduled basis wanted visits at their request. Conversely, some respondents being visited only when they requested their instructors' assistance wanted visits on a scheduled basis. This indicates that instructors should be sensitive to the needs of their students and, whenever possible, involve students in the planning and scheduling of their farm visits.

6. Although the young farmer programs have not met the needs of "dropouts" as well as the continuing students, two-thirds or more of the respondents in each group indicated their needs were almost or completely met by these programs. This fact is also reflected in the reasons for dropping out which were more of a personal nature (i.e., too involved in civic, religions, or social activities) rather than dissatisfaction with some aspects of the program.

On the other hand, some students might have continued attending in spite of conflicts with other personal interests if they felt their programs were being adequately conducted and were meeting their needs.

Instructors can reduce the number of dropouts by continuous program evaluation to determine how well their students' needs are being met and by making the appropriate adjustments and/or improvements.

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